

THROUGH THE TELEPHONE.

A Comedy

IN

ONE ACT,

FROM THE GERMAN OF EUGÈNE MÉRY.

TRANSLATED BY

"REN."

Toronto :
PUBLISHED BY HUNTER, ROSE & COMPANY.

MDCCCLXXXI.

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Dramatis Personae.

COUNT FALKENAU.
ROUDOLF (His Son.)
HELENE (His Niece.)
EDITH.

VON WERDENSFELS (Councillor of
Legation.)
A DOMESTIC.

THE scene is laid in the drawing-room of Castle Falkenau. A glass door at the back of the stage, opens on a terrace ; from the terrace, steps descend to right and left, leading to the garden. Side doors of the drawing-room to right and left. In the foreground, to the left, table beside a sofa ; slightly in front of this a telephone hanging on the wall. To the right a breakfast-table laid for four.

THROUGH THE TELEPHONE.

SCENE I.

HELENE is seen seated on the sofa thoughtfully bending over a book.—EDITH enters hurriedly with a wreath of wild flowers.

EDITH. How perfectly delightful is a morning in the country. How fresh! How fragrant! I envy you, greatly dear Helène, the delight of living in such an altogether charming place!

(HELENE makes an impatient movement, then appears more than ever engrossed in her book.). You do not answer! You turn away! Come, look up. Dear child, you are weeping! A bride, betrothed just three days ago, weeping! The book must indeed be a pathetic one that could bring tears in the midst of so much happiness! (*she bends over, HELENE'S shoulder and reads*) "Another way of making sauce à la Béchamelle!" (*laughing*) that is indeed a most pathetic subject!

HELENE. (*starting up*) O, do not laugh, Edith, and, above all, do not talk to me of my happiness—— (*pointing to the table on which are scattered a number of open letters*). There! A dozen congratulations, and all harping on this same engagement, which even in these three days has become so intolerable. Each letter commences with "such a delightful surprise!" They cannot be more surprised than I am myself!

EDITH. Helène!

HELENE. It is quite true. Listen to me——Should I not be altogether charmed to realize at last, that I have really come into the world for no other purpose, than to fill gracefully the position of haus-frau at Castle Falkenau—— 'Tis a pity, a great pity, that my heart rebels against such an enviable prospect. 'Tis

absurd even, if you like, and I am quite ready to laugh at it all with you, only I entreat, dear Edith, no more congratulations !—(*pointing to the book which she holds in her hand*) See this sauce à la Béchamelle is the true type of an engagement (*reads*) “requires, by a very hot fire, but a few minutes to cook, is then served immediately.” My engagement, on the contrary, resembles more a compote of apples, that is allowed to simmer for hours and is served luke-warm. O, it is all most wretched !

EDITH. But I do not comprehend ! What has happened ? What is so wretched ? Remember each complaining word is a crime against Rudolf.

HELENE. I am unhappy because I am not happy ! That is enough. Does not every girl believe herself to be at least once, no matter for how short a time, the happiest creature in the world ? Why should not I be also ? O, what a glorious thing must it be to be loved ; to feel that, as Goethe says, “Love’s joys reach to heaven, its sorrows down to death !” Ah, Heaven ! How glorious !

EDITH. What ! You do not love him then ? But it is not possible ! You have loved him always, as it were. Shall I remind you of the contents of your 210 letters to me ? Shall I remind you of a name that was written on every page, and indeed more than once ! We will say, however, that it occurred but once on each page, and that the letter comprised but nine pages—because, as you know, the eighth was always crossed (*she counts on her fingers*) 9 times 200 are 1800, and 9 times 10 are 90 ; that makes altogether 1890—— 1890 times Rudolf ! And that, never but with renewed praises.

HELENE. What a terrific talent you display for arithmetic !

EDITH. And now, the moment this much beloved and bepraised Rudolf becomes yours, you will pretend that you do not care for him any longer ? Absurd ! You may tell such a tale to some one else, but not to me, who, since our childhood, have known all the secrets of this dear little heart——

HELENE. Indeed, yes, Edith ! You and he were all the world to me ; now I have but you——. At all events, *you* will not want to marry me !

EDITH. (*laughing*) Well, if *that* is his only fault !

HELENE. Of course it is ! But why should he dream of

such a thing? In fact he never did dream of it, it is all a fantasy of uncle's—of that I am convinced. Such an idea would never have entered RUDOLF'S brain.

EDITH. You think so? And yet it was just this lot that he, Rudolf, chose and sought.

HELENE. Sought! No, no, he simply *found* it——. He was told that I was “the most appropriate” wife for him: do you understand? “the most appropriate?” O, it is too dreadful! I had rather be a hundred times the most *inappropriate* and yet feel that he could not live without me. But to be calmly disposed of in this fashion—first because they believe I am the most *appropriate* wife for him; and secondly, because it is deemed a tolerably advantageous marriage; and lastly, as one involving no great trouble to arrange. No, I *never* will endure such tyranny!

EDITH. Hélène! You are surely joking again——. Did I not know you so well, I would not listen to such a frivolous speech.

HELENE. Joking! Frivolous! My engagement is levity itself!

EDITH. But your engagement is not announced. Why did you give your consent to it so soon?

HELENE. Ah, well, to be quite candid, I confess I love him so much, that I cannot find it in my heart to deny him anything! We were such great, great friends! Since uncle took the place of my dear parents, Rudolf was like a darling brother to me. We walked and rode together, while uncle played whist with the Rector—in short we shared all our simple pleasures and transient woes! I grieved even over the measles and hooping cough when they came! How often, indeed, have I wished him a dear little wife, somebody who would gradually fill my place in his heart; somebody good and beautiful, and charming like you, for instance.

EDITH. Pray leave me out of the question, Hélène. Now that we are speaking of the happiness of a lifetime, it is no time for jesting.

HELENE. But I am not jesting; about two years ago Rudolf passed his winter in Munich,—it was your first season out—

and on his return he was quite enraptured about you, indeed spoke of no one else. He told me how you had vanquished all hearts on making your *début*. I never saw him so enthusiastic (*unperceived by Helène, Edith starts painfully*), so I vowed that you should learn to know and love him, and to that end I sent so many pressing invitations for you to come and visit me,—which, however, you always declined—you naughty girl!

EDITH. I—could not come. You remember I wrote you that my very amiable step-sister imagined she was ill and needed my care.

HELENE. We thought it merely an excuse, and were really quite offended with you; as for Rudolf, he did not even attempt to conceal his chagrin.

EDITH. Dear Helène, you speak of everything and anything rather than of the most important of all things—your engagement, of which I know absolutely nothing. Yesterday, I received a telegram from you, saying, “I am engaged to Rudolf Falkenau, and await your congratulations, Helène.” In an hour, my trunk was packed, and I had left home, arriving here by the evening, to find myself in the midst of a goodly assemblage of people invited for the purpose of wishing you joy. It was late when it broke up, and you were then too tired for an exhaustive chat. Now, however, you must tell me the whole story of your love affair—how did it all come about?

HELENE. It is soon told. One day we rode, as usual, through the lanes, Rudolf was anything but talkative. As I glanced at him, I perceived that his face grew gradually longer and longer. At last he stammered out these words: “Helène, will you marry me?” This was so unexpected that I felt as if fallen from the clouds. And, yet, I never dreamed of saying no to my dearest friend. I was much moved by the few simple, but sincere words, that had cost him such an effort,—the tears came into my eyes—and, so, after a moment’s silence, I answered simply, “It is true, Rudolf, that I am taken somewhat by surprise, but you must know what you want, dear friend, and I love you dearly, so I do not see why I should not be your wife.” Whereupon there followed a long pause—after which, pressing my hand

gently, he said, "Thank you so much, dear Helene!" Voila toute l'affaire, the whole apple-compote of my engagement.

EDITH. Eh, bien! And then?

HELENE. Then? and then!—That was all. As we came home we met uncle at the gate, he had a most peculiar smile on his face, and looked for all the world as if he knew we would have a great piece of news to tell him! So I felt convinced beyond all doubt as to where the idea of this marriage originated. As Rudolf assisted me to dismount, he came up, and, on Rudolf saying something about "Your consent," and "darling Helène," he kissed me on both cheeks, and immediately ordered two bottles of Champagne for dinner, that all might be done in due form. And thus I became engaged. (*She weeps.*)

EDITH. Dear child; take heart; why not confide in Rudolf himself; he is the soul of honour!

HELENE. Yes, I know, he is everything that is good and kind; but he is that to all the world. To me, confess I am right, Edith, he really ought to behave quite otherwise than he does; is it not so? He feels to-day as he did three days ago—and God forgive me, as he always will feel ———.

EDITH. Helène!

HELENE. Verily, I have not yet perceived any symptoms of his being violently in love. I do not perceive that he is much given to roaming about, in a restless fashion, looking for me; and when he does find me see him becoming suddenly pale; why, he does not even blush, which signifies far less! It were quite the correct thing that he should be subject to long fits of silence; but then he should look at me all the more, with such a solemn, earnest look that one could easily see his thoughts were all of me! Ah, me! To what good is it all, if, in the end, neither of us are happy!

(COUNT FALKENAU and RUDOLF appear in the centre door-way) But here they come, and breakfast must be discussed before all things. (*She goes to meet them.*)

EDITH. (*Aside.*) Ah, la pauvre! she loves him and he ———
Coûte que coûte, something must be done!

SCENE II.

(*The same.* COUNT FALKENAU, RUDOLF.)

HELENE. Good morning, dear uncle ! good morning, Rudolf !

FALK. Good morning, dear child ! your friend (*bowing to Edith*) was before you this morning. I saw her quite two hours ago, sauntering toward the Swiss Pavilion. (*To Edith*) Did you find it, Miss Edith, and if so, how did it please you ?

EDITH. O, I think it altogether charming, Count, and delightfully quiet and secluded—quite ravissant.

FALK. Yes, quite so. Helène calls it "The Nunnery." It is also Rudolf's favourite corner—where he can read and rest after the labours of the chase. On this account I wished to call it "Rudolf's Rest," but Miss Wiseacres here declares that sounds too much like the cooing of a turtle-dove ! Well, she may be right (*he imitates it*) "R-r-rudolf's R-r-rest." But she has improved upon my idea and made a happier suggestion. To procure a rapid communication she has had a telephone arranged. Look, Miss Edith, here ! I should not wonder if she used it for the purpose of making him pretty speeches !

RUD. Exactly ; you are quite right. For instance, she called through it yesterday to ask which I thought the greater bore, a husband immersed in his business affairs, or a dreamer in the Swiss Pavilion ?

HELENE. And I am still waiting to hear the answer.

EDITH. (*interrupting, to RUDOLF.*) I can quite understand your partiality for this delightful little forest-retreat. Unfortunately I could only see it from the outside as the door was locked ; I remember quite well how you used to rave over it two years ago.

RUD. Indeed, I am much flattered that you should remember—(COUNT FALKENAU and HELENE sit down to breakfast, EDITH and RUDOLF continue talking.)

FALK. Be sure to improvise a good menu to-day, Helène, you know that I have invited my old friend V. Werdenfels

to dine with us, that I may announce your engagement to him. It will be amusing to witness his astonishment. Only a short time ago he tried to question me in an off-hand manner about your relationship to Rudolf, but I pretended not to comprehend.

RUD. (*Aloud to EDITH.*) I am surprised to hear that you could so easily renounce all the pleasures of society.

EDITH. Indeed there was little or no renouncing. I consider that country life is much more agreeable than town life.

FALK. (*To EDITH.*) My dear Miss Edith, permit me to ask if you prefer cold to hot tea for breakfast, if you consider it one of the delights of country life? (*EDITH turns quickly and takes her place at the breakfast table; RUDOLF follows more slowly.*) Rudolf, have you told Helène of my plans?

RUD. I have not—how could I, sir, when I have only just seen her. Besides, there is no end of time.

FALK. No doubt; but I imagine she will have a word to say about her future home.

HELENE. My future home! Positively, uncle, you make me curious! Where should it be but here?

FALK. You are a dear, good child, Helène, but I fancy there are some things—no doubt a most limited number, but still a few—that I understand better than either of you two wise people, and this is one of them. Newly-married birds should have a nest of their own. The basso-profundo of an old man, even if he is not precisely a Werewolf would scarcely harmonise with your love-duet.

HELENE. But really, uncle, dear, you do not know what you are saying.

FALK. Silence! and obey orders! Four years ago I persuaded my friend V. Werdenfels to buy the property adjoining ours. Now he wishes to find a purchaser, as he in reality does not much care to live in the country, quite remote from society, so it is only fair that having persuaded him to buy the place, I should help to disembarass him of it. Therefore I offered to buy it of him myself—to-day we close the transaction—that I might have the pleasure of presenting it to you, dear Helène, on your wedding-day.

HELENE. Dearest uncle, how good you are! But, indeed we

shall not consent to forsake you merely for our wee little bit of a wedding! We must all live together.

RUD. To be sure, sir! There will be no occasion to change our present mode of life in the slightest.

HELENE. You hear, uncle? We are both quite of one opinion.

FAL. All this is, indeed, most kind and praiseworthy in people just going to be married; but this time you must really allow me to carry out my own ideas. What is your opinion, Miss Edith? I fancy, judging from your face, that you agree with me.

EDITH. I most certainly do (*looking at HELENE*); so much goodness and unselfishness deserve the *warmest* thanks.

HELENE. That means to say, that we appear ungrateful! Very possible, but at the same time—

RUD. (*interrupting, to EDITH.*) Pray do not reproach me, Miss Edith! The thought of leaving our dear father is a most painful one to me, and Helène will certainly feel lonely without him.

EDITH. Lonely! With her husband!

HELENE. As Edith is becoming romantic again, I shall take the opportunity of escaping with my cookery-book to Mrs. Grumpy—for a profound consultation over our *ménu*; so good-bye for the present. We shall meet later in the garden.
(*exit to the left.*)

SCENE III.

EDITH, COUNT FALKENAU, RUDOLF—*they rise.*

FAL. Helène has changed very much during the last few days! Formerly, she was always so gay and insouciant; now she seems quite restless and irritable.....It proves that too much happiness is not good for one! (*goes to table and takes a cigar, to EDITH*), with your permission, (*to RUDOLF*), have you not observed the change, Rudolf?

RUD. I? No, I have not. Helène was never capricious.

EDITH. (*Aside to RUDOLPH, while COUNT FALKENAU lights his*

cigar.) Take me into the garden. Count. I have something to say to you——

RUD. To say to me, Miss Edith ?

EDITH. (*Aside.*) Yes, to you ; it concerns the happiness of my dearest friend—of Helène.

RUD. (*Aloud to EDITH.*) Will you allow me, Miss Edith, to show you the interior of the Swiss Pavilion ? It is built after the model of a Swiss chalet—only with a little more comfort.

FAL. Indeed, Miss Edith, you may feel flattered that Rudolf exchanges his daily ride over the fields for the pleasure of a promenade with you ; I doubt if Helène can boast of as much. (*RUDOLF offers his arm to EDITH, which, after a moment's hesitation she accepts ; they pass out through the centre door, waving a good-bye to COUNT FALKENAU.*)

SCENE IV.

COUNT FALKENAU, *alone.*

FAL. Wonders will never cease ! The boy is still gallant ! Helène has merely spoilt him a little by perpetually yielding to all his wishes ; and yet girls like to see a man empressé. Ah, bah ! If they have been so happy as playmates for years, they will surely be still more so when they are married ; and, at all events, such marriages do not end in disappointment. Well, I will have a ride over the fields myself this morning ! (*Goes out through the centre door. During this monologue a domestic removes he breakfast equipage, then retires to the left.*)

SCENE V.

VON WERDENFELS *enters through the centre door and looks carefully around.*

VON WER. No one here. Quelle chance! I shall have time to rehearse the programme of my mission once more, as the chief always recommended me to do when I was as yet an embryo attaché. To begin with, first, to find a good excuse for the non-appearance of my honoured father. Secondly, to make the acquaintance of a little school-room flower that has, he says, carried off every premium at all the flower shows in the country. Thirdly, when I shall have seen her, to ask myself if there be no way of transplanting this same little flower to the perpetual embellishment of our conservatories at home—as Goethe did in the end with his pretty Christiane:

“Ich grub’s mit allen
Den Wuerzlein aus,
Zum Garten trug ich’s
Am huebschen Haus.”

“*Am huebschen Haus*”—a most absurd verse. Neither did Goethe so carefully transplant all his Lillis, Lottas, and Frederikas! Bah! no no! I do not think I shall do that! But to proceed. Fourthly, in any case to enjoy a good dinner, champagne included, and fifthly, to effect the disposal of our chateau. (*Walks several times thoughtfully up and down the stage.*) I must be circumspect! A beauty that has been brought up with a cousin and heir—carries forever in her heart the image of that cousin, against which I, for my own part, have nothing to say. However, I do not find it such a bad programme on the whole. Nous verrons!

SCENE VI.

(*The same.* HELENE comes in from the left.)

VON WER. Ah! We are to commence with number two—the little school-room flower! And quite as it should be! (*bowing*) If I mistake not, I have the pleasure of addressing the Countess Helène

HELENE. V. Falkenan And I?

VON WER. Hector von Werdenfels, formerly Counsellor of Legation, to-day ambassador extraordinary of his father.

HELENE. Ah ! the traditional son of our dear friend !

VON WER. Traditional !

HELENE. Because until this moment you belonged only to tradition, like Roland or Sir Percival. But I am charmed to meet the original. The many famous voyages which your father,—by-the-by, where is Baron von Werdenfels ? He promised to visit us to-day.

VON WER. Will you have the goodness to accept me as his representative, for as such I am in fact here ; in the act of mounting his horse the brute shied and threw the old gentleman to the ground ! (*accompanying his description with gestures.*)

HELENE. Great heaven !

VON WER. (*aside*) Gently, gently, Werdenfels, you are becoming too dramatic. (*aloud*) Pray, do not alarm yourself, Countess ; he fell in the soft grass, merely hurting his arm—no, his foot, or rather, I should say, his knee, yes, his knee ; but the injury is very slight, I assure you, not of the slightest consequence.

HELENE. (*relieved*) How very fortunate ! (*aside*) He is evidently amusing himself at my expense ! (*aloud*) To tell the truth, I was quite unaware that Baron von Werdenfels rode at all.

VON WER. O yes, indeed, on a pony, a most amiable pony.

HELENE. Amiable ! Indeed ! and to-day ?

VON WER. Caprice, merely caprice, believe me. (*Aside.*) I underrate the devil and talk nonsense.

HELENE. But this capricious pony might have cost your father his life.

VON WER. O, one does not die so easily—especially we Werdenfels.

HELENE. May one ask how you obtained this delightful conviction ?

VON WER. O, I have tried the experiment so often myself—in America alone twenty times ! I fell into the hands of the Indians and was not scalped (*runs his fingers through his hair*). You perceive it is the real thing ! For months I strode through the forests and no poisonous snake bit me ; no panthers sought

to devour me,—the buffaloes of the priaries did not ruffle a single hair of my head, the mustangs broke no ribs,—only the gauchos pillaged me unmercifully. I was shipwrecked in the Antilles but I escaped—almost without a wetting.

HELENE. (*With great composure.*) I shudder!

VON WER. At San Franciscoe I was hurled—in a train—over a precipice to the depth of a hundred feet!

HELENE. (*Same play.*) I tremble!

VON WER. I should certainly have been murdered by the Mormons if one of the fifty-four wives of the Prophet had not rescued me. She was a charming blonde, the youngest of all.

HELENE. Blondes are very seldom bloodthirsty—at least when they are young.

VON WER. What! You doubt?

HELENE. O, not at all! Your charming blonde merely recalls to my mind a story in which another blonde, no doubt equally as charming, played the principal rôle.

VON WER. You arouse my curiosity. May one hear the story?

HELENE. Assuredly! One good turn deserves another. Listen then. I have a cousin——.

VON WER. (*aside*) Already the cousin!

HELENE. Who also visited the Mormons—not, indeed, as a tourist, like yourself, but for the purpose of studying their customs—he had a partiality for Mormonism. Brigham Young imagined that he discovered in him a future apostle. My cousin was quite at home in the house of the prophet. The fifty-seven wives—you say he had but fifty-four at the time of your visit—did their utmost to make his stay in Salt Lake City as agreeable as possible. One in particular—a charming blonde, the youngest of them all—paid him marked attention. In the gratitude of his heart, he sought every opportunity of cultivating her society. So it chanced, that once, when they were alone, she confessed to him—— Wait a moment—— What did she confess to him?

VON WER. (*aside*) The little country girl is a humbug!

HELENE. Ah! now I know! She confessed to him that she had been dreadfully unhappy ever since she had seen him—he, the noblest of all men!

VON WER. Very flattering to the cousin.

HELENE. (*smiling*) O, not so very after all. She did not mean *him*——

VON WER. No? How was that?

HELENE. But quite another man, whose life she was once said to have saved, but who afterwards very ungratefully ran away. (VON WER. *wishes to interrupt her but she raises her hand for him to keep silent.*) She begged my cousin again and again to take her to Europe, saying, "I cannot rest until I find him once more. I know his real name, and who he is!"

VON WER. (*stiffly*) So do I.

HELENE. (*starting, then laughing*) I have forgotten it.

VON WER. Baron Muenchhausen is his name—of the House of Quixote and Werdenfels—is it not so?

HELENE. Pray forgive me the little revenge.

VON WER. (*bowing*) As you have earned forgiveness in such a charming manner—— And, indeed, I somewhat deserve the punishment. And yet there is some truth in the story of the charming blonde——

HELENE. (*shutting her ears*) For heaven's sake, do not begin again, I beg! Besides, it is quite time that we were looking for uncle. I will help you to find him. (*They go out chatting through the centre door.*)

SCENE VII.

EDITH comes in to the right, and sinks wearily down on the sofa, throwing her hat and sunshade on the table.

EDITH. (*after a pause*) Ah, me! There is not a doubt of it—they are neither of them happy—neither he nor Helène! and to the end that she might be happy, have I fought bravely with my love, and conquered it. It is his fault—he does not love her, and she feels this—must feel it—all the promises he has just made me will avail nothing—one cannot feign true affection. Perhaps he might yet learn to appreciate her love, could I for the present induce Helène to be calm. At all events I will make the attempt—— (*Rises and goes towards the door.*)

SCENE VIII.

The scene : RUDOLF enters at the moment that EDITH reaches the door : on seeing him, she retreats quickly.

EDITH. You—startled me !

RUD. Forgive me—I was looking for you, Miss Edith. Pray listen to me for one moment. Just now you were rather hard upon me, and I bore it all in silence, because you were partly right—not entirely—but I cannot bear that you should think so contemptuously of me——

EDITH. At the present moment it signifies very little as to what my opinion may be, but a great deal as to Helène's whole happiness in life.

RUD.—O, I understand only too well what I have undertaken to perform ; yet listen to me—*your* contempt would make the fulfilment still more difficult.

EDITH. I did not know

RUD. No, you did not know ; but you shall know—for *you* are the cause of all my misery

EDITH. I ! Count !

RUD. Yes, you. I did not reproach you for remaining indifferent and cold in your manner to me, while I looked only to you as the source of my greatest happiness. I bore it all in silence, as I say, because I felt too keenly your evident contempt. Soon, however, this very feeling drove me to consent to the earnest wish of my father, and win Helène, whom, after you, I loved best in the world, although in such a different way. I persuaded myself that I should succeed in making her happy, by a most tender friendship and an unswerving constancy, in which I should also for myself find peace and consolation — And yet it was a falsehood, for I owe her a happy and undivided heart, and cannot give it her ! This falsehood now binds us both. But as far as lies in my power, I shall sacrifice everything to keep her from the knowledge of this bitter truth, even if I am to go through life without the hope that any of its joy may be mine. Dear Miss Edith, do you still claim the right to despise me ?

EDITH. I claim, at least, the right to refuse to listen to you a moment longer. If you found me cold and indifferent I intended to appear so, because your attentions belonged alone to Helène—whose heart you had then entirely won. If, as you say, you desire my good opinion, obtain it—by putting your whole soul into the task of restoring to Helène the peace and happiness of which you have robbed her. Then only—be sure of my friendship!

RUD. Friendship, I had perhaps, already deserved —
Farewell. *(Exit quickly thro' the centre door.)*

SCENE IX.

(EDITH alone. She buries her face in her hands for a moment, then looks up.)

EDITH. O, would to Heaven it were only friendship that I feel for him!

SCENE X.

EDITH, HELENE and VON WERDENFELS come in through the centre door; HELENE lingers at the door.)

HELENE. I have never seen Rudolf looking so strange. He rushed past like a maniac without seeing us. Ah, a thousand pardons, Edith; allow me to present to you Baron von Werdenfels—Baron von Werdenfels, Miss Edith von Baligand—my dearest friend. Perhaps you can explain to us Rudolf's confusion; he must have been here?

EDITH. It may be—I believe — He wanted — Yes, of course, to find you — It is strange, dear Helène, but the change of air seems to have given me a headache; will you allow me to retire to my room for a little while?

HELENE. Poor child! I am so sorry! But you surely will

not want to shut yourself up in the house? Go to the Swiss Pavilion; it is so deliciously cool there—the most delightful of all places for a good rest.

EDITH. Thanks, very many. I will follow your advice. Au-revoir! (*She bows and passes out by the centre door.*)

SCENE XI.

(HELENE and VON WERDENFELS.)

HELENE. What, in Heaven's name, is the matter with both of them?

VON WER. Do you mean that for a question?

HELENE. Certainly.

VON WER. Have you ever seen two people who are in love?

HELENE. I think—not.

VON WER. I mean *two* people who are in love, because, dear Countess Helène, you have no doubt seen just as many single instances of such people as there are members of the stronger sex within your magic circle! (*Kisses her hand.*)

HELENE. (*Withdrawing her hand quickly.*) You do not answer my question.

VON WER. I was just on the point——

HELENE. Indeed! I did not perceive it.

VON WER. Do you honestly mean to say it never occurred to you that a love-scene has just been enacted here?

HELENE. A love-scene between Edith and——

VON WER. And your cousin Rudolf, precisely!

HELENE. No, no, it is impossible—horrible!

VON WER. I confess I cannot see anything so horrible about it.

HELENE. It is very honorable of them—very!

VON WER. But, good heavens, Countess Helène, Rudolf is not a married man!

HELENE. Married or engaged, it is all the same!

VON WER. Engaged? Rudolf? That undoubtedly alters the

case, and I acknowledge myself in the wrong ; quite a new experience, I assure you. But I had not heard of the engagement.

HELENE. Really ! you had not heard of it ?

VON WER. How was it possible ? I only returned home yesterday, and I doubt if my father knew of it either.

HELENE. That is true, he could not have told you.

VON WER. Will you satisfy my curiosity and tell me who the fair one is ? And yet, notwithstanding all this I keep to my first opinion, that those two are in love ! How happy he must be with the other one !

HELENE. You think so.

VON WER. Most certainly ! He has probably resigned himself like a dutiful son, to the paternal command.

HELENE. How do *you* know that ?

VON WER. Merely from experience ! It is generally the fate of phlegmatic natures ! The son accepts as a bride the choice papa, perhaps partly from business motives, has made. To him all women are equally fair ! For her part, if she does not look higher, she finds a certain happiness in setting before him his favourite dishes as often as possible, and in knitting him yearly a dozen pair of woollen hunting socks for his birthday.

HELENE. A horrible fate !

VON WER. Horrible ! Well, it depends greatly on the character. You, of course, dear Countess Helène, would find it unbearable. Let us hope that the future Countess of Falkenan is of quite another mould, a thorough German haus-frau, who will look at every stitch taken in her knitting with as much pride as Cornelia felt when looking at her children. Du reste—it seems unfortunate, for your charming friend appears quite disposed to be happy with Rudolf. 'Tis a pity, a thousand pities, that one may not aid them a little, it were altogether for his own good, and the beautiful fiancée would doubtless be able to console herself.

HELENE. (*Heartily.*) She would indeed !

VON WER. How do *you* know that ?

HELENE. (*Aside.*) True. (*Aloud.*) O, merely from experience.

VON WER. (*Aside.*) What a delightful creature ! But all the same she will never become my father's daughter.

HELENE. (*Aside.*) This diplomat has keener sight than I. Edith's embarrassment ! Rudolf's hesitation. Ah, yes, it is too true ! And I ? Eh, bien, "where there's a will there's a way." (*Thinks a moment, then pointing to Von Werdenfels.*) Shall I confide in him ? Perhaps he might advise me. (*Aloud.*) Baron Von Werdenfels !

VON WER. At your service, Chère Comtesse !

HELENE. Your idea pleases me ; We will throw down the gauntlet on Edith's behalf and declare war against Rudolf's fiancée. I wager that we will win.

VON. WER. I call that a hazardous undertaking !

HELENE. Not if you will aid me !

VON WER. I am charmed ! To be of use to the fair sex is my pet hobby, so we will found a philanthropic society, à deux ; pray dispose of me as you please.

HELENE. Thank you. But how are we to begin ? As diplomat you should take the lead.

VON. WER. And my reward ?

HELENE. You must look to Rudolf's fiancée for that.

VON. WER. What, you consider me entitled to a reward from *her*, when I summon all my energy to aid in transferring her future husband to another ?

HELENE. Who knows but she may be very grateful to you ? I, for my part, can quite fancy it.

VON. WER. You are certainly more sanguine about it than I. (*Aside.*) I should prefer to receive my reward from these rosy lips. Werdenfels, Werdenfels, *you* indulging in sentiment ? And for the very girl whom the paterfamilias ? No, no, no, no ! (*Aloud, forgetting himself.*) I ought, indeed, to be ashamed of myself !

HELENE. And why ?

VON WER. Why what ?

HELENE. Why you ought to be ashamed of yourself ?

VON WER. Ashamed of myself ? O, O be—because I have not yet thought of a plan.

HELENE. You are a most useful ally ! And there is not a moment to be lost,

VON WER. A la Bonheur ! A bright idea has just dawned upon me ! Where did you send your friend, Miss Edith, just now ?

HELENE. To the Swiss Pavilion.

VON WER. And where do the telephone wires lead to, that you showed me a few moments since in the park ?

HELENE. To this same Swiss Pavilion. (*Shows him the telephone which he takes in his hand.*) Here is the telephone itself.

VON WER. Is it possible to recognise the voice from one point to another ?

HELENE. No, we have often laughed at the peculiarly wooden tone of the voice while speaking through it, it is quite unrecognisable.

VON WER. So far, so good. With this little instrument then we will entice Miss Edith's secret from her. Rudolf has, no doubt, already, confessed his love to her. Men are not apt to be backward in that respect. She rejected him with indignation, merely because she knew he was not free. Let us tell her that he is so now ! I will undertake to personate Rudolf, and you shall prompt me ; the rest will follow of itself.

HELENE. Ah, what a delightful diplomat ! The idea is charming. Let us commence immediately by making him ask Edith's forgiveness ; no doubt there is cause enough.

VON WER. (*Speaking through the telephone.*) Miss Edith ! (*listening.*) She is there and asks who calls her. (*Thro' the telephone.*) It is I, Rudolf ! Are you still offended with me ? (*Listening, then to Helene.*) Bravo, it succeeds à ravir ! She asks : "What do you want ?" (*Thro' the telephone*) Your forgiveness—and your love ! You had the right to be angry with me just now, because I then belonged to another.—(*To Helene.*) That is quite true ?

HELENE. Continue, continue. Do not pause I beg of you.

VON WER. (*Through the telephone.*) To another—as I have said ! Then I was bound, but now I am free ! (*To Helene, who takes the tube in her hand and listens.*) I am somewhat curious to hear the answer.

HELENE (*repeating aloud as she listens*). "Free ! and you imagine this will move me ! Even had I once loved you, I could only now despise one who was faithless to his word." (*To*

VON WERDENFELS) Merciful heavens! It is all too true. What more is there to say?

VON WER. What more? O, that is very simple. We must tell her that Rudolf is innocent; that it is his fiancée who renounces *him*.

HELENE (*with feeling*). Yes. Tell her that Rudolf's betrothed renounces him for ever; that she loves him with sisterly affection, but can never, never be his wife. There would follow only misery for them both (*she weeps*).

VON WER. (*greatly surprised*). Shall I repeat all that, word for word?

HELENE (*recovering herself*). Yes, yes! Why do you hesitate?

VON WER. Does it not sound slightly arbitrary on our part!

HELENE. How tiresome you are! Have I not said that I make myself responsible for all?

VON WER. (*Aside*.) I quite believe it. Countess Helène goes bail for Countess Helène. Diplomacy is at fault; we will not confess it, however, but take revenge! (*Takes the telephone from her, but retains her hand in his.*) (*Through the telephone*) "I am free, and have not broken my word. My betrothed refuses to marry me because she loves some one else!"

HELENE. But indeed that was not what I said!

VON WER. It is too late to recall it. Now comes the test.

HELENE. Pray let me listen. (*He holds the telephone to her ear, without freeing her hand; she listens and repeats each word.*)

"Rudolf is that true?" (*To VON WERDENFELS*) Dieu merci! Le jeu ne va plus!

VON WER. Pardon me, I have still something to say! (*Through the telephone, and yet facing HELENE*) My darling, listen while I tell you how dearly I love you—as I never dreamt that I could love. Be mine, dear heart, and say the words that I long to hear, darling, say "I love you, Rudolf!" (*To HELENE, as he gives her the telephone*) Now, Countess Helène, I beg that you will listen this time, and tell me what you hear. (*HELENE puts the tube somewhat unwillingly to her ear.*) Eh, bien! No answer.

HELENE. Alas, yes!—she wished for one.

VON WER. Which is—

HELENE. (*In a low and embarrassed tone*). "I love you."

VON WER. Dear Helène, how charmingly you give me my answer—for it was not RUDOLF who spoke just now to Miss Edith, but I who spoke to you and demand now my reward from Rudolf's fiancée.

HELENE. What! You knew?

VON WER. Well, I have been long enough in finding it out. And my reward, Helène?

HELENE. I protest it is quite unfair to insist on being rewarded for a good deed!

VON WER. But I protest it is quite as unfair to refuse to reward a good deed! However, I will be modest and content myself with a repetition merely of the three little words—I love you—solely, for the sake of the charming manner in which you say them.

HELENE. What childishness in a Member of Legation! But I will be generous and grant your request (*abruptly, without expression*)—I love you.

VON WER. No, no, that has not the true ring,—you shall not escape thus. Pray try again, and this time with more expression!

HELENE. How very exacting! Will this do? (*with feeling*)—I love you—(*smiling coquetishly*). Have I succeeded better this time?

VON WER. (*Kissing her hand with rapture.*) Ah, were it only true!

RUDOLF *appears in the doorway.*

HELENE. (*Seeing RUDOLF*)—Rudolf!

SCENE XII.

The same RUDOLF.

RUD. Baron Von Werdenfels (*both gentlemen bow stiffly*), pardon me if I deprive you for a moment of the society of the Countess Helène,

VON WER. Certainly, certainly! In the meanwhile I will look up Count Falkenau (*aside*). You shall have time in which to seek an explanation (*exit*).

SCENE XIII.

HELENE—RUDOLF.

HELENE. (*Confidingly*) Are you jealous, Rudolf?

RUD. After what I have just seen, I fancy I should have ample cause—

HELENE. If in truth you really loved me—yes! But jealousy without love is a tyranny of which you are not capable.

RUD. You doubt my love, Hélène?

HELENE. No, Rudolf, no! I know that you love me as truly, as devotedly as I love you, that there is no sacrifice we would not willingly make one for the other. To prove this, you, Rudolf, thought to take the initiative by forcing your old friendship for me into a stronger feeling—into a love that not I, but another only, was capable of inspiring, but, thank God, I discovered the truth in time to save us both, or rather Baron Werdenfels did; with his aid I have been able to make you happy in spite of yourself. Thanks to this telephone, Edith imagines you have told her that our engagement is broken off. There is now nothing left for you to do but to fly to the Swiss Pavilion, open your arms and cry—My own Edith!

RUD. Hélène, what a cruel jest—

HELENE. A thousand thanks! But you had better try it nevertheless; go.

As RUDOLF rushes off, she calls him back—

Rudolf! What I said just now to Baron Werdenfels was only a piece of fun. He would insist upon it, and I did not like to refuse after the great service he rendered me."

RUD. The great service of freeing you from me. (*Laughing.*) Well, he should replace me!

HELENE. For shame, Rudolf, how can you say such absurd things ?

RUD. Don't be so indignant, dear Helène ! Let us imagine for a moment that you *have* fallen in love with him. Good heavens, what a blush ! I verily believe I have stumbled on the truth !

HELENE *turns quickly away.*

SCENE XIV.

The same. EDITH *enters hurriedly and throws herself into HELENE'S arms.*

EDITH. Dear Helène, how can you ever forgive me ?

HELENE. (*Leading EDITH to RUDOLF*). You belong here now !

HELENE. Edith, my love, dear one !

EDITH. I cannot realize it yet, Rudolf ! Then all you said through the telephone was quite true ?

HELENE. He did not say it ; but it is quite true, all the same.

EDITH. (*To HELENE*). And you are really in love with somebody else ?

HELENE. (*Nodding her head.*) If you like to have it so. But now let us talk sensibly. Uncle has not the remotest idea of what has happened ; so, although, no doubt, he gains infinitely by an exchange of daughters-in-law, it is nevertheless time we should inform him of the *changement de décorations*.

RUD. I fancy Von Werdenfels will have already prepared him for it.

EDITH. Why, what does he know of it ?

RUD. Slightly more than you imagine, I will tell you by and by how he come to know so much, for here he comes now with the *pater*.

HELENE. He too !

EDITH. (*To HELENE*). I feel so heartily ashamed of myself I should like to hide in some corner.

HELENE. (*Putting her arm around EDITH*). How absurd ! Do you feel ashamed of being happy, Rudolf ?

EDITH. But, Helène, *your* heart is beating even louder than mine.

HELENE. (*Withdrawing her arm quickly*). Nonsense ? You imagine it ; there is no reason why it should.

SCENE XV.

(*The same*). COUNT FALKENAU AND VON WERDENFELS.

FAL. Well children, these are fine doings ! and as I expected that mischief Helènechen is at the bottom of them all. Now I know why she has worn such a long face these last few days !

HELENE (*Pointing to RUDOLF*). So has *he*, too, uncle ! But behold how radiant it is now !

VON WER. Like Siegfried's when he rushes through the flame to free Brunhilde.

RUD. (*To VON WERDENFELS*). My dear Baron, how can we sufficiently show our gratitude to you ?

VON WER. (*Aside*). I am hoping that I shall also have cause to be thankful for to-day's dénouement.

EDITH. (*To COUNT FALKENAU*.) The guest who has so shamefully abused your hospitality, deserves only your displeasure.

FAL. (*Smiling and taking her hand*.) Possibly, dear Miss Edith, did not this dear boy look so tremendously happy ! (*kissing her on the forehead*). I shall gain a charming daughter.

HELENE. And retain a charming niece !

VON WER. (*To HELENE in a low, pleading voice*). Not for long, I trust !

FAL. (*To HELENE*.) Until the right man makes his appearance.

RUD. I fear he has already done so, father.

VON WER. (*Softly to HELENE*.) Duty calls me to my post in a few days.

HELENE. (*Softly*). To the Mormons ?

VON WER. (*Softly*). No, no, to St. Petersburg ; must I indeed bid you good-bye for the last time to-day ?

HELENE. (*Softly*). For to-day ; yes ! But there is no reason why we should not say good-bye again to-morrow !

VON WER. (*Kissing his hand*). What a charming diplomatist !

HELENE. (*Laughing*). Not quite yet, dear Baron Von Werdenfels.

FAL. Baron Von Werdenfels, I am now quite at your service. Shall we discuss our business affairs in the Swiss Pavilion ?

VON WER. A thousand pardons ! I confess that, in the midst of a so much more agreeable occupation, I had entirely forgotten the business part of my programme ; however, I am now altogether at your disposal. (*Softly to HELENE, and pointing to the telephone.*) Pray remain near this friendly little instrument, dear Helène, so that if all goes well I may send you my good wishes and congratulations

THROUGH THE TELEPHONE.
